It Was A Great Day

Food Trucks At The Museum II on November 18 was another hit with visitors! (We’ll borrow the nomenclature from Super Bowl since this party is looking like a Super Event for SWWM.) The food and fun and touring the SWWM succeeded in pulling in over 700 visitors, which is a new attendance record for an event at the museum.

The weather for the mid-November day did not disappoint as it was sunny and warm, and visitors started arriving early to grapple with some tough decisions on where to start for lunch. There were Columbian specialties (Mucho Rico), Mexican tacos (Uneeda Taco), southern soul food (Eddie’s Restaurant), Filipino treats (Lumpia Pinoy), classic barbecue (Fire & Smoke), and some shaved ice cups to cool down and sweeten up with (Shiver Shack).

The picnic area was a SWWM “food court” set under the spreading branches of the huge live oak tree. From the food court could be seen several vendors offering crafts for sale plus the museum’s raffle. We had multiple donated items that were being offered to lucky visitors who bought the winning tickets.

Washing over the entire scene was music from Joan Nerrettig and her guitar.

Also nearby was an unusual exhibit provided by Walter Jacobs Nature Park. They brought a baby alligator and friendly snake for visitors to see (and touch), which provoked lots of “wows” and some “eews”! Thank you to Stacy Gray from the park for setting this up and to Sara Wilkerson for helping. Stacy was also a winner in another way because she won our “Guess the Weight” game. We brought out one of the plant’s two-man-sized wrenches and challenged visitors to make a guess for a dollar on what it weighed. Stacy nailed it with a guess of 59 pounds!

As with Food Trucks #1, the big hit of the day seemed to be the water works. Visitors poured through the museum all day, either guiding themselves or lining up for a guided tour every half hour with one of the museum’s hardworking tour experts. Thank you
to Kevin Haines, Randall Palmer, Paul Williams, and Charlie Johnson for showing the museum to a lot of visitors. The great interest in the water works and the appreciative comments of visitors were particularly gratifying since this was really the whole point of having the event. Not only are there now over 700 fewer people who can no longer say “I never knew this place was here”, but at least two of them so far have been back out to furnish volunteer work. Plus, a bonus is that the day’s activities brought in a profit of almost $1,500 to boost the bank account.

It took a lot of work to have all this fun. SWWM’s own Maria Schmelz (see nearby story) recruited daughters Lola and Macy for chores (thank you!), plus going “above and beyond” in working to pull off the day. In addition to the helpers already mentioned, thanks are owed to the amazing Tonnies family (Keith, Linda, Chris, and Casey), Dave Bland, Jeff Cornelius, and Charlie Pease.

Liz Swaine and her team from Downtown Development Authority (particularly Stacie Leng and E. D. Stewart) go on top of the “thank you” list for sponsoring the event and doing the legwork needed for publicity, setting up, cleaning up, and miscellaneous manual labor. It’s great to have a DDA that will go “hands on” to promote Shreveport’s downtown attractions.

This was all so much fun we’ve got go it again sometime!

Meet Maria

Maria Schmelz is the newest member of Shreveport Water Works Museum’s little staff. She is sharing her time between SWWM and Spring Street Historical Museum by working part-time at each location. Maria is an accomplished photographer and collaborator with Shreveport Regional Arts Council plus having job experience at another nonprofit before moving to Shreveport some years ago.

Maria is operating the museum on Sundays, which has made it possible to add another day to the schedule and welcome visitors six days per week. The new schedule is Tuesday through Saturday 10a to 4p and Sunday afternoon 12n to 4p. Veteran tour guide Kevin Haines is on site as host each day besides Sunday.

In addition to Sunday, Maria is working two more days each week to manage Facebook (our Facebook friends have no doubt noticed), promote the museum, provide liaison with external visitor organizations, look for grants, and help with the work needed to stage events like Food Trucks. She is also directing her attention to encouraging more contact with local educators, and SWWM has already seen an uptick in school field trips this fall. So, in general, Maria is working on whatever needs to be done to make SWWM a success!

How Did Cleaning Day Go?

Your Fall edition of this newsletter announced that a Clean Up Day was scheduled for September 23, which has now come and gone. There was a good turnout of 23 workers (could have used even more!) who donated their Saturday morning to give the 130-year-old lady a sweep, wipe, prune, polish, wash, pick up, dust and vac. Items that had sat in the same spot for years were moved and cleaned. It was hot, it was dirty, everybody sweated A LOT but got some good things done.

Neat and tidy was the order of the day in a historic water
plant that is still in its working configuration. The machine shop was particularly nice minus all the accumulated dust, as were the boiler room and laboratory. Many of the windows in the highest visibility areas got cleaned, and the steam whistle shines now. The gardening crew also did a great job rescuing the street sign from weeds and overgrown landscaping.

A few of the jobs on our to-do list didn’t quite get done due to lack of time and manpower, but the museum looks 1000% better. A huge general thank you to all the too-numerous-to-mention volunteers who made it happen. More Clean Up Days are needed to keep it that way, so if you missed the first one, come on out next time!

We Get Visitors....

The museum passed an attendance milestone recently when it shot past the previous annual visitor record of 4,736 set in 2014. Through the end of November there have been 5,032, and we’re still counting to year’s end. Quite a contrast to year #1 in 2007 when 540 visitors came! Of course, these would not be big numbers for a lot of places, but it’s worth remembering that SWWM was only open 24 hours per week, or less, for long stretches before we were able to move it up to 28 hours in March and then to 34 hours recently when Maria started to work.

We’ve been pleased recently to welcome the 5th grade classes from University Terrace, the 3rd graders from Turner Elementary, and a science program from Benton High School. The SWWM can pack a lot of educational value into a short visit, so we’re trying to get noticed by local schools and get more opportunities to impress on kids where their taken-for-granted water comes from, the science behind the scenes, and water history in Shreveport.

Status Report

Regular readers of the newsletter all know by now that the Preservation Society has contracted with the city to operate the SWWM and has been doing so since last March. A while after that milestone, the city awarded a $40,000 grant to the Preservation Society, which is more or less enough money to operate the museum on a very lean budget for a year. But, that was a lump sum, one-time award and going forward the museum will be depending on donations to stay open. So the Board has been taking care to manage the money already in the bank while it has worked to supplement that money with short term fundraising (like with Food Trucks and Give For Good) and make plans for the longer term.

Donations from all sources have trickled in all through the year and so far, so good. In years past, a big source of money for the Preservation Society has been the membership renewal appeal that goes out in December to friends and potential friends (look for your letter!). There aren’t enough members (currently about 125) to donate enough money to run the museum for a year, but the generosity of these old friends, and of new friends, will be particularly important from now on. Bottom line of all the above is there are challenges to face, but things are looking pretty good right now for the Shreveport Water Works Museum.

Members Meeting

The annual meeting of McNeill Street Pumping Station Preservation Society members will be at 5pm on February 12 at the museum. The principal item of business will be election of directors to the board. Director’s terms are organized into three groups, so the election will address those directors whose term is expiring.